



Blake NORTHCOTT · Donny TRAN
Omar REMALANTE Jr. · Jaymes REED

BLOCKADE
ENTERTAINMENT

#2
OF 5

VOL. 5
COVER A

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT A Kris



15 years of **aspen comics** for you, by us
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VOL. 5

COVER B

**EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT**

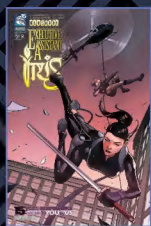
#2

OF 5

**A
Kris**



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DIRECT EDITION
BY DONNY TRAN
& ERICK ARGENTEA



DIRECT EDITION
BY KEU CHA
& OMI REMALANTE JR.

"Chaos by Design"

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DONNY TRAN

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CHAPTER TWO

The story so far...

During an attempted kidnapping of recording artist, Trent Hauntwell, at the Frankfurt Airport, Executive Assistant Iris revealed her true occupation as his undercover bodyguard while saving his life in the process. Following the rescue, her reputation was plastered all over the news and drew the attention of Magni Global, the worldwide leader in security. After an exuberant pitch from Alexander Magni, the head of the company, Iris tentatively agreed to join their ranks, unsure of what her future holds at the massive conglomerate...

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A comic book panel depicting a violent confrontation. A bald man in a grey hoodie and green balaclava is being held from behind by a woman with black hair in a ponytail, wearing a blue hoodie, red balaclava, and black boots. She is holding a handgun that has just fired, with a bright orange muzzle flash. The man has a bloody wound on his back. In the background, a large American flag is partially visible, and a sign on a wall reads "Ben Schoenberg" with stars. A silhouette of a person is running in the distance. The scene is set outdoors with some foliage at the top right.

CONTROL IS HARD
TO QUANTIFY.

WE CANNOT SEE IT,
OR TOUCH IT, OR TASTE
IT. ASK A HUNDRED
PEOPLE TO DEFINE THE
WORD, AND YOU WILL
RECEIVE A HUNDRED
DIFFERENT ANSWERS.

BUT WE ALL WANT IT.

WE WANT TO KNOW THAT
WE ARE THE ONES STEERING THE
SHIP, NAVIGATING THE WATERS OF
OUR OWN DESTINIES. CONTROL IS A
CURRENCY THAT CANNOT BE MEASURED,
BUT ATTAINING IT MEANS **POWER**...
OVER OURSELVES, OVER OTHERS...
SOME ARE DRIVEN TO MADNESS
IN PURSUIT OF IT.

AND SOME
ARE WILLING TO
DIE FOR IT.

90 MINUTES
EARLIER.

35,000
FEET ABOVE
CALIFORNIA.

WHETHER WE WERE FIGHTING
WITH OUR WORDS OR OUR
WEAPONS, HUMAN BEINGS
ARE **ALWAYS** LOOKING FOR
THAT EPHEMERAL MOMENT.

THAT SPARK OF EXCITEMENT WHEN
WE FEEL, JUST FOR A **SECOND**,
LIKE THINGS ARE GOING OUR WAY.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH' TOUR

I'M SORRY, BUT **FACTS**
DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR
FEELINGS. WHEN WE DISCREDIT
OUR POLITICAL OPPONENTS BY
USING MORAL ARGUMENTS,
ALL LOGIC CEASES TO BE--

JEEZ, THIS **BEN
SCHOENBERG** DUDE
SURE LIKES TO HEAR
HIMSELF TALK.

WELL HE **IS** ON A
'FREEDOM OF SPEECH'
TOUR. IF HE DID NOT HAVE
ANYTHING TO SAY HE WOULD NOT
SELL MANY BOOKS. I HAVE SEEN
A FEW OF HIS YOUTOOB VIDEOS
IN PREPARATION FOR OUR
ASSIGNMENT.

WHATEVS. AS LONG
AS MAGN'S CHECKS
KEEP CLEARING, I'M CHILL
WITH PROTECTING
ALMOST ANYONE.

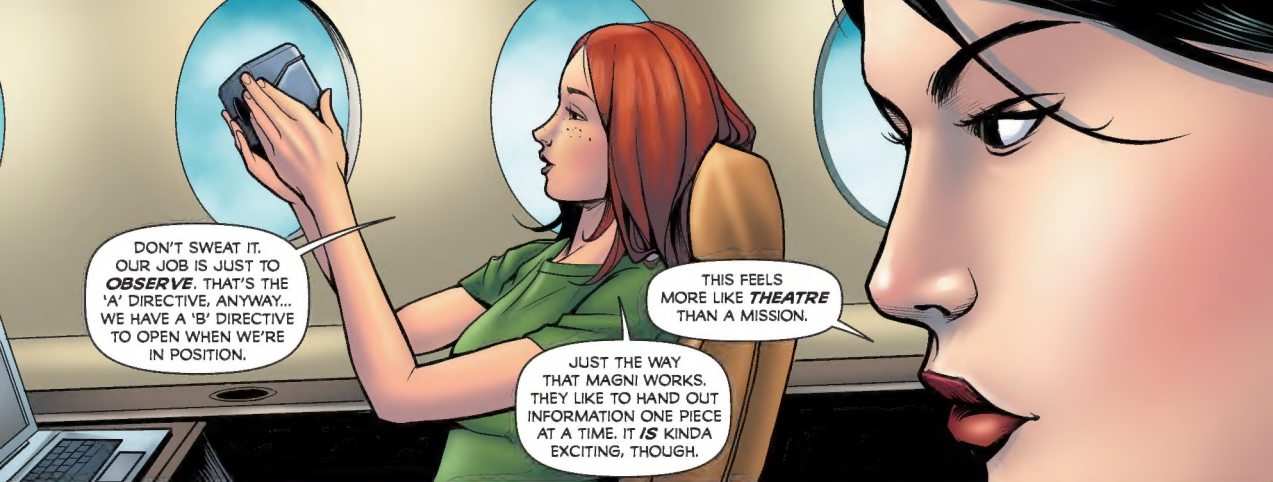
HAS HEADQUARTERS
INDICATED HOW MUCH
PROTECTION HE IS
GOING TO REQUIRE?

A **LOT**, FROM THE LOOKS OF IT. THREE
HUNDRED ON THE GROUND, AND THEY
LOOK MIFFED. THEY'RE ALSO STIRRING THE
POT ON CHIRPER, SO THERE COULD BE A
THOUSAND BY THE TIME WE ARRIVE.

LOCAL LAW
ENFORCEMENT?

THEY'RE ON A
STAND-DOWN ORDER.
THEY'LL BE HOLDING A FEW
BLOCKS AWAY. UNLESS THE
SYRUP **REALLY** HITS THE
CEILING FAN, THEY
WON'T MOVE IN.

SO IT IS YOU
AND I AGAINST A
MOB? I AM NOT
ENCOURAGED BY
THESE ODDS.



DON'T SWEAT IT. OUR JOB IS JUST TO **OBSERVE**. THAT'S THE 'A' DIRECTIVE, ANYWAY... WE HAVE A 'B' DIRECTIVE TO OPEN WHEN WE'RE IN POSITION.

THIS FEELS MORE LIKE **THEATRE** THAN A MISSION.

JUST THE WAY THAT MAGNI WORKS. THEY LIKE TO HAND OUT INFORMATION ONE PIECE AT A TIME. IT *IS* KINDA EXCITING, THOUGH.

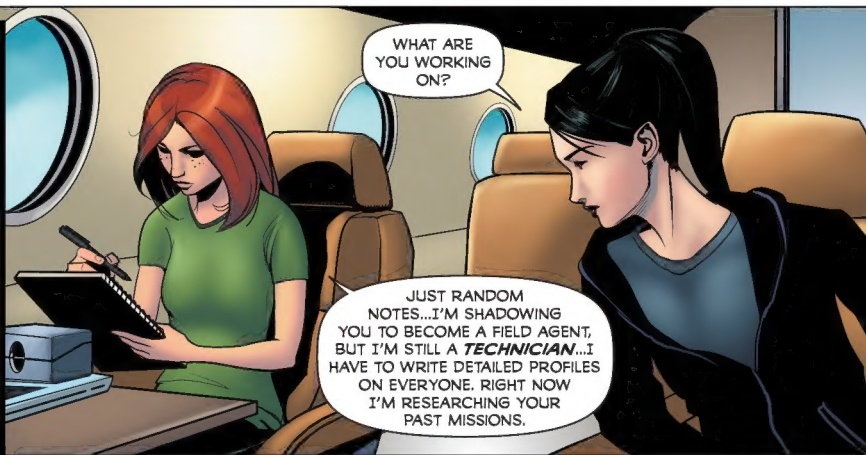


I STILL HAVE MY RESERVATIONS ABOUT **ALEXANDER MAGNI** AND HIS METHODS, THOUGH I *AM* IMPRESSED BY THEIR TAILOR. THESE ARE SO LIGHTWEIGHT... I CANNOT BELIEVE THEY ARE **BULLETPROOF**.

YEAH, THEIR GEAR IS PRETTY DOPE. THANKFULLY I DON'T **NEED** PROTECTION, BUT I CAN DEFINITELY SEE THE APPEAL.



YOU...DO NOT **NEED** THE PROTECTION? ALRIGHT.



WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON?

JUST RANDOM NOTES...I'M SHADOWING YOU TO BECOME A FIELD AGENT, BUT I'M STILL A **TECHNICIAN**...I HAVE TO WRITE DETAILED PROFILES ON EVERYONE. RIGHT NOW I'M RESEARCHING YOUR PAST MISSIONS.



SPEAKING OF **MOBS**, IT SEEMS LIKE YOU HAVE SOME EXPERIENCE IN THAT AREA...WANT TO HEAR A STORY I HEARD ABOUT YOUR TIME IN JAPAN? MAYBE YOU CAN HELP ME FILL IN SOME PLOT HOLES?

I WILL DO MY BEST.



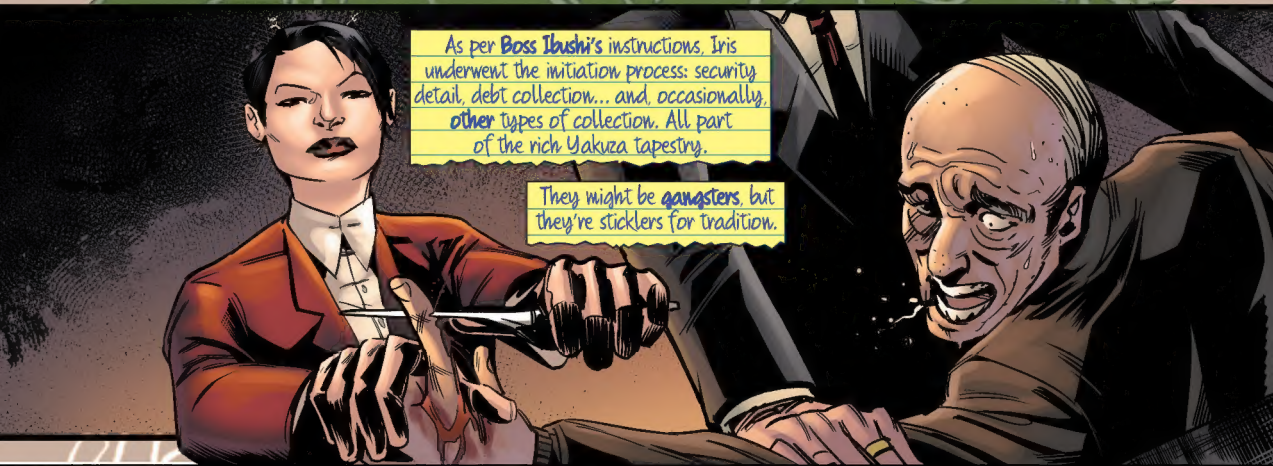
While under the employ of Francis Wai-Hong Ching, Iris was tasked with an undercover assignment: infiltrate Japan's deadliest Yakuza gang, 'Yamaguchi-gumi'.

Ching was keen on thinning out their ranks, making room for Chingacorp to expand into the Tokyo real estate market unchallenged... and without having to pay unnecessary 'protection fees'.



Yakuza clans rarely bring women into their syndicate, especially as muscle, but Iris's audition was more than enough to impress a high-ranking lieutenant.

After acing her interview, Yamaguchi-gumi accepted her with open arms.



As per Boss Ibushi's instructions, Iris underwent the initiation process: security detail, debt collection... and occasionally, other types of collection. All part of the rich Yakuza taping.

They might be gangsters, but they're sticklers for tradition.

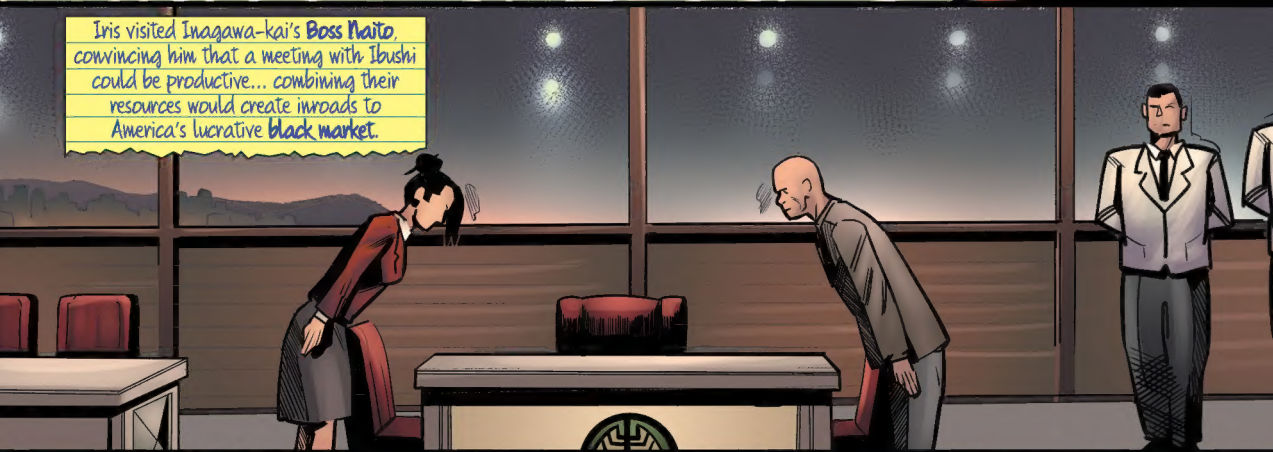


And like all clans, Yamaguchi-gumi has a rigid hierarchy. Going from the rank of 'little brother' to 'lieutenant' often takes years, but Iris expedited the process.

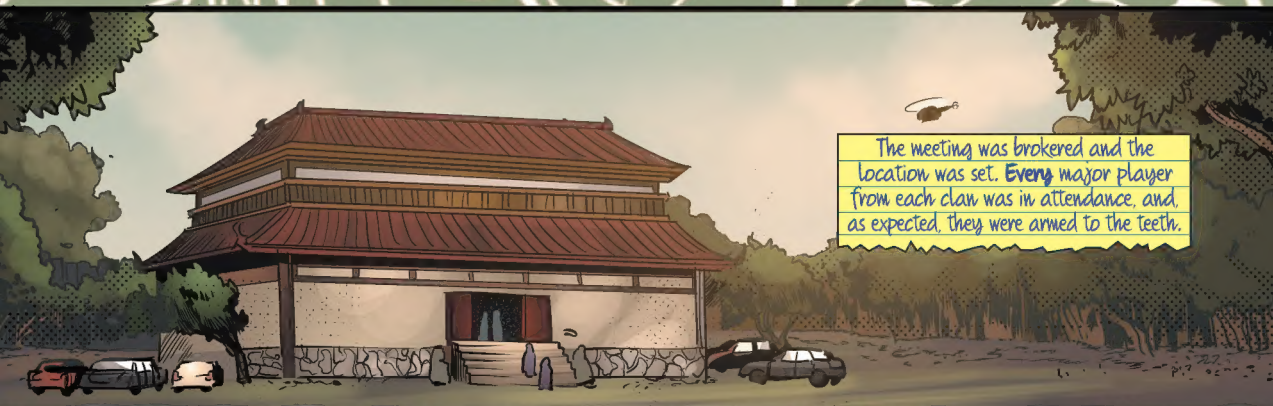
Her efficiency at debt collection impressed Ibushi... she was instantly promoted.



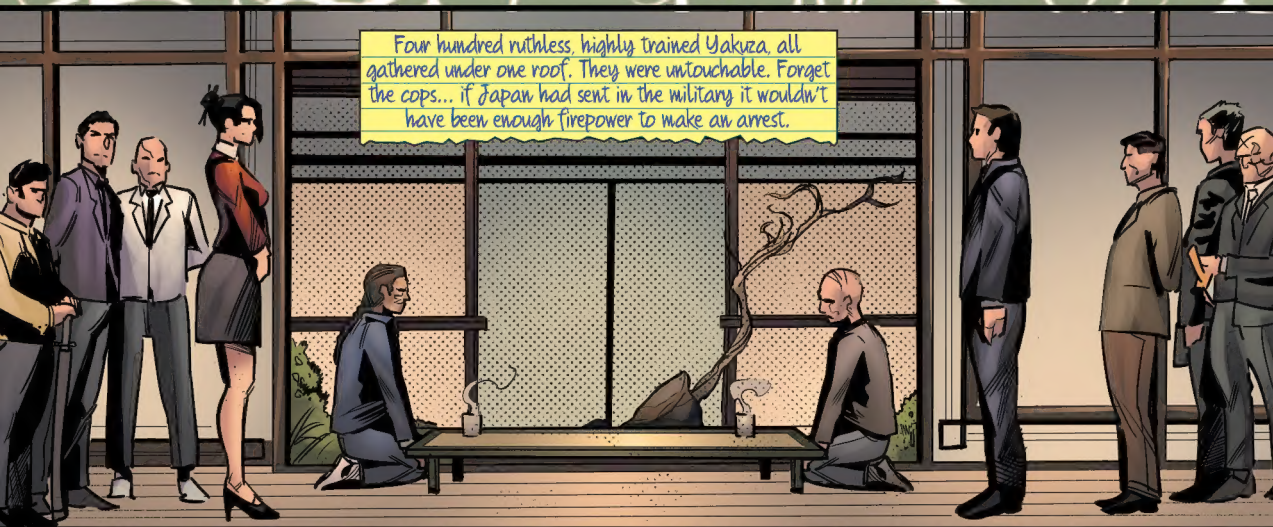
Before long, she'd become Ibushi's trusted advisor. So much so that he listened when she advised that the only way to grow was through a merger. A truce with Tokyo's Inagawa-kai clan would lead to international expansion.



Iris visited Inagawa-kai's Boss Naito, convincing him that a meeting with Ibushi could be productive... combining their resources would create inroads to America's lucrative black market.



The meeting was brokered and the location was set. **Every** major player from each clan was in attendance, and, as expected, they were armed to the teeth.



Four hundred ruthless, highly trained Yakuza, all gathered under one roof. They were untouchable. Forget the cops... if Japan had sent in the military it wouldn't have been enough firepower to make an arrest.



Once everyone was settled, Iris sprung her trap.

The following day, descriptors used by the press ranged from 'bloodbath' to 'warzone', but words alone weren't enough to contextualize the carnage... to paint a grim enough picture of what had taken place.



The police recovered more than twenty thousand shell casings from the crime scene. The temple was so structurally damaged it had to be condemned.



There were almost no survivors. A few dozen Yakuza with a pulse were rushed to a nearby hospital, but in the end, none of them pulled through... with the exception of Boss Ibushi.



Ibushi was questioned by journalists, guards, the warden... but to this day, he refuses to say how both clans were wiped out by a single woman within a matter of minutes.

How did you pull it off, by the way? Are you as good with a sword as everyone says?



THE PODIUM IS **TOO FAR** AWAY. IF THE PRINCIPAL NEEDS EXTRACTION, I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO REACH HIM IN TIME.

THIS WAS THE **A DIRECTIVE**: THIS ROOFTOP, OBSERVATION ONLY. WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BUDGE UNLESS WE GET A CALL FROM HQ.



THIS IS GOING TO SPIRAL OUT OF CONTROL, MACK. THERE ARE **HUNDREDS** OF HOSTILES, AND THEY JUST SEEM TO BE GETTING ANGRIER.

WHY DO AGENCIES USE WORDS LIKE '**PRINCIPAL**' AND '**HOSTILES**' TO DESCRIBE PEOPLE? IF WE'RE TRYING TO PROTECT SOMEONE, WHY NOT JUST USE THEIR REAL NAME?



LABELS **DEHUMANIZE**. IT STINGS A LOT LESS TO LOSE A **PRINCIPAL** THAN TO LOSE BEN, DEVOTED HUSBAND AND FATHER OF TWO.

AND CALLING YOUR ENEMIES 'HOSTILES' MAKES THEM EASIER TO HURT...IF THE SITUATION CALLS FOR IT.

DARN, THAT IS **DEEP**.

YOU DO NOT NEED TO WRITE THAT DOWN.



I WAS TOLD TO OPEN THE **B DIRECTIVE** ONCE WE'D ARRIVED AT OUR POSITION. LET'S TAKE A LOOK-SEE...THIS IS EXCITING-- I FEEL LIKE I'M WINNING A PRIZE.





SICK! IT COMES WITH A BULLET.

UNLESS THERE ARE A FEW HUNDRED **MORE** WHERE THAT CAME FROM, WE SHOULD CALL HEADQUARTERS AND ASK FOR **ANOTHER** PACKAGE.



NO, IT'S NOT FOR THE PROTESTORS. IT'S FOR A **POLICE CAR**. THAT ONE, RIGHT THERE.



THIS IS DIRECTIVE B: IT'S AN **EXPLOSIVE** ROUND. YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO SHOOT IT AT THE CAR IF THE CROWD STARTS GOING HAYWIRE.

DIRECTIVE B

THAT DOES NOT MAKE ANY **SENSE**. HOW DOES MAGNI KNOW THAT WILL NOT INFLAME THE MOB EVEN FURTHER? THE OBJECTIVE SHOULD BE TO PROTECT THE PRINCIPAL...VIOLENCE SHOULD ALWAYS BE THE FINAL OPTION.



AN EXPLOSION WILL BE ENOUGH TO END THE STAND-DOWN ORDER AND BRING IN THE LOCAL PD. THEN **THEY** CAN EXTRACT THE PRINCIPAL, AND EVERYONE GOES HOME HAPPY.

IT COULD TAKE THEM TEN MINUTES TO GET HERE AND DISPERSE THE CROWD...MAYBE LONGER. IF A RIOT BREAKS OUT, **BEN** COULD BE **DEAD** IN TWO.



THIS IS **HIGHLY** IRREGULAR. I AM CALLING HEADQUARTERS FOR CLARIFICATION.

WE'RE **NOT** SUPPOSED TO CALL HQ, IRIS...AND WAIT, I THOUGHT WE WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO CALL THE PRINCIPAL 'BEN'?



REALLY, YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO USE AN **UNSECURED** LINE EITHER, BECAUSE THE PROTOCOLS DICTATE THAT UNLESS... **AAAAAAND** SHE'S DIALING.



HELLO? THIS IS IRIS. YES, **THAT** IRIS.



I DO NOT **CARE** HOW SECURE THIS LINE IS. GET ME ALEXANDER MAGNI **IMMEDIATELY**. WE HAVE AN ISSUE.

I'M MAKING A NOTE RIGHT HERE THAT I SPECIFICALLY TOLD YOU **NOT** TO DIAL. THIS IS GOING IN MY REPORT.



HIS RACKETBALL GAME WILL HAVE TO BE CUT SHORT BECAUSE I NEED AUTHORIZATION FOR AN OPERATIONAL CHANGE.

NOOOO...NO. NO, NO. THAT'S **NOT** HOW MAGNI WORKS! WE DON'T CALL AUDIBLES. WE FOLLOW **DIRECTIVES**.

JUST LAST WEEK I HEARD THAT JAKE LAZARUS GOT SENT TO HR FOR GOING OFF-SCRIPT, AND IT DIDN'T GO WELL.

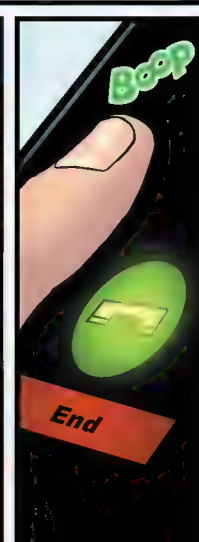


I AM NOT CONCERNED WITH HAVING A **NOTE** ADDED TO MY FILE. I **AM** CONCERNED WITH OUR CLIENT-- AND **INNOCENT PEOPLE**-- POTENTIALLY BEING KILLED.

I DON'T THINK YOU UNDERSTAND... **HR** IS WHERE--



WELL, IF YOU **CANNOT** GET ME MR. MAGNI, TELL HIM **DIRECTIVE B** IS OFF THE TABLE. I AM MAKING MY **OWN** DIRECTIVE.



THAT WAS **NOT** SMART, IRIS. WE HAVE PROTOCOLS IN PLACE FOR A **REASON**, AND AS YOUR TECHNICIAN, I'M HERE TO KEEP THINGS RUNNING SMOOTHLY. IF THERE'S A--



IRIS?



HQ? THIS IS MACKENZIE HOLLAND. **YES**, I KNOW THIS ISN'T A SECURE LINE, BUT WE HAVE A **SITUATION**. I DON'T CARE. GET ME ALEX **NOW**...THINGS ARE ABOUT TO BLOW UP.



MAGNI MIGHT CALL THEMSELVES A **PROTECTION AGENCY**, BUT THIS IS NO WAY TO PROTECT A CLIENT. I NEED TO BE WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE IF I AM GOING TO BE EFFECTIVE. AND THAT COULD MEAN GETTING MY HANDS DIRTY.

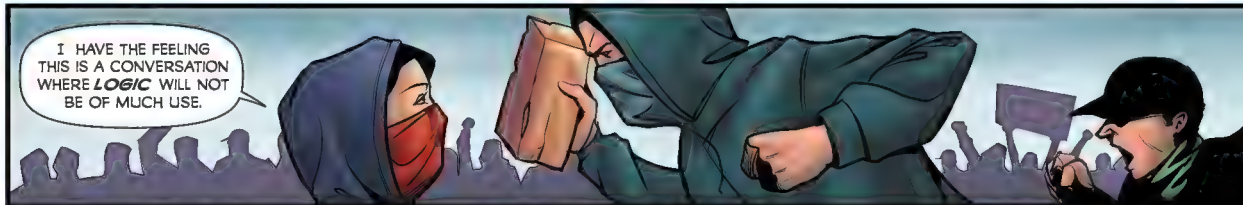


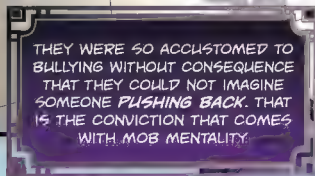
DEMONIZING YOUR OPPONENTS AS MORALLY DEFICIENT IS NOT ONLY UNJUST, BUT IT SHOULD BE COMPLETELY OUT OF BOUNDS WHEN IT COMES TO POLITICAL DISCOURSE!



THIS IS **HATE SPEECH!**

GET OFF THE STAGE, YOU **FASCIST!** AND GET OFF OUR CAMPUS!







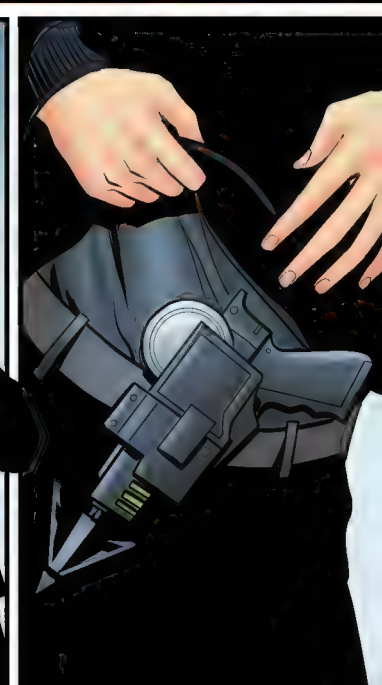
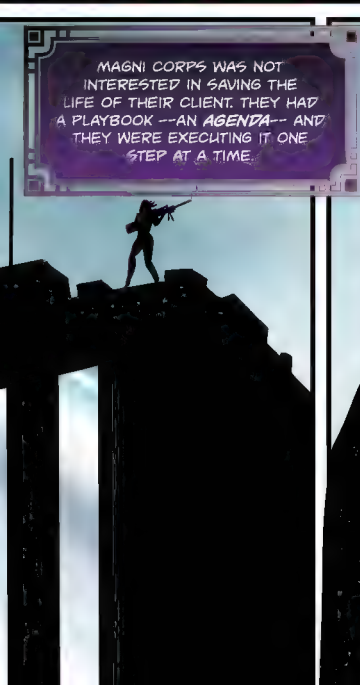
NICE PARTY TRICK.
BUT NEXT TIME, DON'T
BRING A **SWORD** TO
A **GUNFIGHT**.

IN A MOB, IT ONLY TAKES **ONE**
OR **TWO** INSTIGATORS TO START
THE MADNESS...TO SPARK THE
TRAIL OF **GUNPOWDER**.



A THREAT IS MADE.
A WEAPON IS DRAWN.
A SHOT IS FIRED AND
IN A SPLIT SECOND, THE
FLAME BURSTS TO LIFE,
AND RUSHES MADLY
TOWARDS THE POWDER
KEG. IT IS IRREVERSIBLE,
PICKING UP SPEED.

AND BEFORE
YOU KNOW IT...







MAGNI GLOBAL
HEAD OFFICE,
LOS ANGELES.



DO YOU HAVE AN
APPOINTMENT? BECAUSE
MISTER MAGNI IS *EXTREMELY*
BUSY AT THE MOMENT, AND
HE'S ASKED THAT
ANYONE WHO--



IRIS, WHAT A *WONDERFUL*
SURPRISE. I'D LOVE TO CHAT BUT I'M
RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING.
IF YOU SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT
WITH CLARISSA, I'M SURE WE CAN
SET UP A *BRUNCH* MID-WEEK.



RESPECTFULLY, I AM DECLINING YOUR INVITATION, ALEX. WE ARE GOING TO TALK THIS OUT **RIGHT NOW**.

FAIR ENOUGH, BUT I'M GOING TO HAVE TO DOCK YOUR PAY FOR THAT DOOR.



WHO HIRED US? BECAUSE IT WAS NOT BEN SCHOENBERG.

YOU KNOW HOW IT GOES: **CLIENT CONFIDENTIALITY**. OUR CLIENTS SEND US THE DIRECTIVES, AND WE ASSIGN THE AGENTS TO CARRY THEM OUT.

AND THEY PAY A HANDSOME PRICE FOR THEIR PRIVACY.

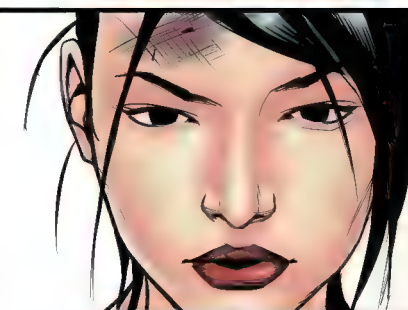


NOT ALL OF THOSE RIOTERS WERE THERE TO FIGHT...THEY WERE ANGRY, BUT THEY WOULD NOT HAVE GOTTEN VIOLENT.

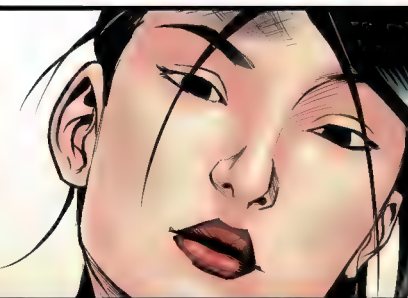
I NOTICED ONE OF THE INSTIGATORS HAD AN **EARPIECE**. IT CAME LOOSE WHEN I DISLOCATED HIS JAW.



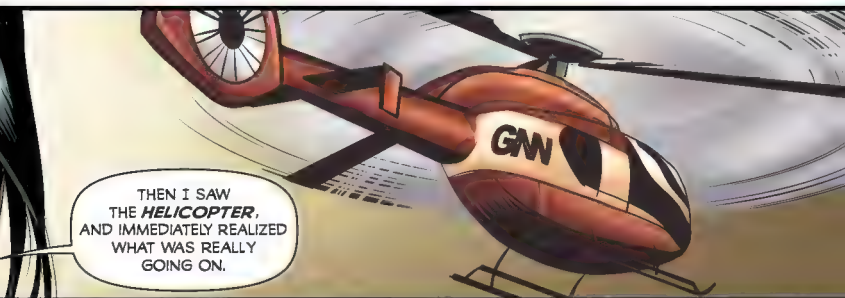
HMMM... CURIOUS.



AND A SECOND PROTESTER WAS WEARING A VEST. NOT A CHEAP ONE. EITHER. STANDARD ISSUE SWAT TEAM BOOTS AS WELL, FROM WHAT I COULD TELL.



THEN I SAW THE **HELICOPTER**. AND IMMEDIATELY REALIZED WHAT WAS REALLY GOING ON.



IT'S NOT THE **EIGHTIES** ANYMORE, DEAR. THE NEWS ISN'T ONE HOUR YOU CONSUME OVER DINNER AND DRINKS. IT'S A TWENTY-FOUR-SEVEN **REALITY SHOW**, AND YOU HAVE TO KEEP THE VIEWERS ENTERTAINED.

I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN ISOLATED FOR MUCH OF YOUR LIFE, BUT THAT'S JUST THE WAY OF THE WORLD NOW.





SO *THIS* IS OUR JOB:
FEEDING THE NEWS CYCLE?
USING *AGENT PROVOCATEURS*
TO SPARK A RIOT SO GNN CAN
INCREASE THEIR RATINGS?

Berkeley, California

SOMETIMES...

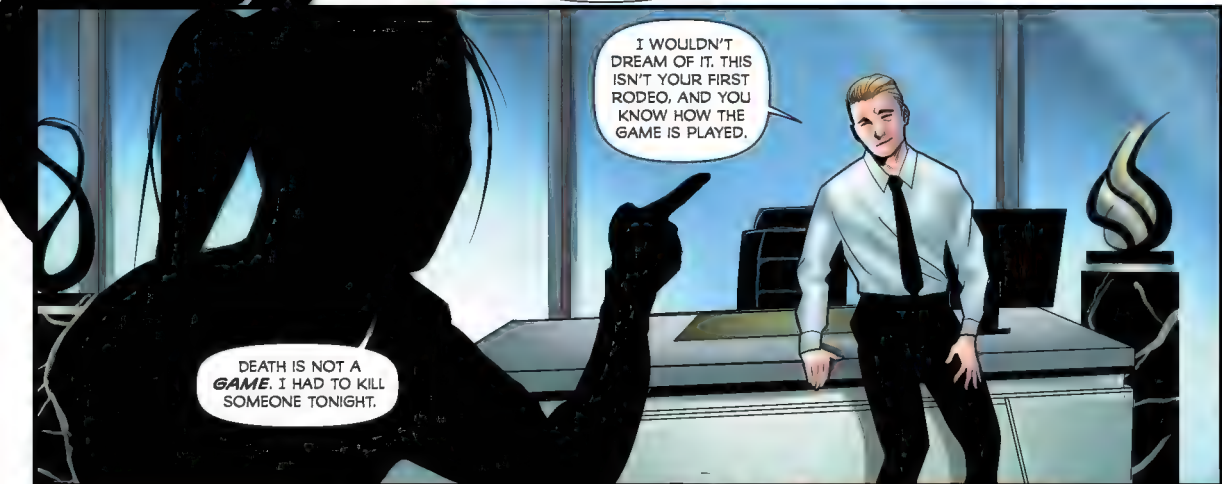
IGNITES RIOTS

FREEDOM

LIVE

AND SOMETIMES IT'S
SAVING A HEAD OF STATE, OR
MAKING SURE A CHILD DOESN'T GET
TAKEN HOSTAGE. AND *SOMETIMES*
IT'S PROTECTING PEOPLE WE DON'T
AGREE WITH ON ANY LEVEL.

DO NOT EXPLAIN
THINGS TO ME LIKE I
AM A CHILD, ALEX.



I WOULDN'T
DREAM OF IT. THIS
ISN'T YOUR FIRST
RODEO, AND YOU
KNOW HOW THE
GAME IS PLAYED.

DEATH IS NOT A
GAME. I HAD TO KILL
SOMEONE TONIGHT.



NOT YOUR
FIRST TIME.

AND I AM SURE IT WILL NOT
BE THE LAST, BUT *YOU* PUT
ME IN THAT POSITION WITH YOUR
LUDICROUS 'DIRECTIVES'. NO ONE
NEEDED TO DIE TONIGHT, AND IF I
HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO HELP
PLAN THIS ASSIGNMENT,
NO ONE WOULD HAVE.

THIS IS *NOT* HOW
THINGS ARE DONE
IN THE FIELD.

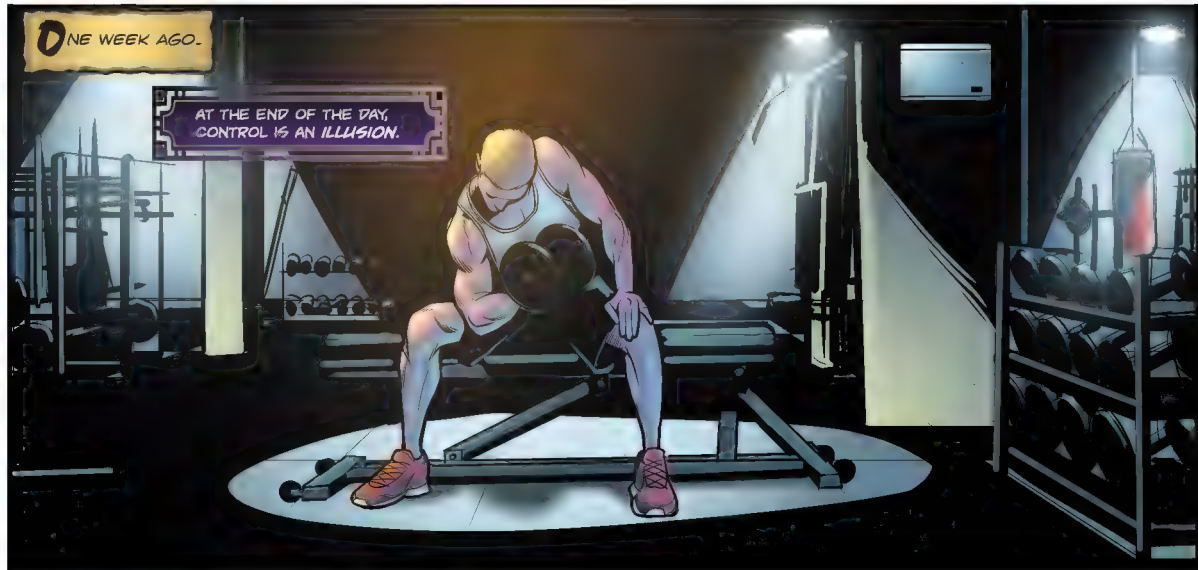


THIS IS HOW *MAGNI*
CORPS OPERATES, SO
GET USED TO IT. SOME ADVICE:
BE FLEXIBLE, BE *COMPLIANT*.
THINGS WILL GO MORE SMOOTHLY
IF YOU RELINQUISH A
LITTLE CONTROL.

I LIKE YOU,
IRIS. IT WOULD BE A
SHAME TO HAVE TO
SEND YOU TO *HR*.

ONE WEEK AGO.

AT THE END OF THE DAY,
CONTROL IS AN ILLUSION.

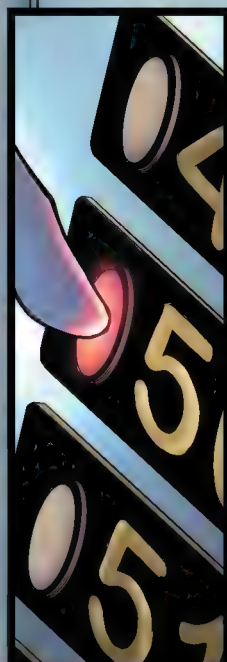


JAKE LAZARUS, YOUR
PRESENCE IS REQUESTED ON THE
50TH FLOOR. PLEASE REPORT TO
HUMAN RESOURCES.



IT OFFERS A DOSE OF WARM,
COMFORTING RELIEF A FLEETING
MOMENT OF SOLACE IN A WORLD
THAT IS PERPETUALLY-- AND
INCREASINGLY-- CAREENING
OUT OF CONTROL.

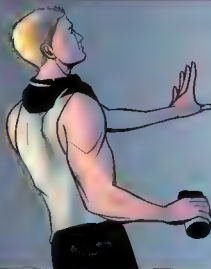
WHAT GIVES US THE ILLUSION OF
CONTROL? IT IS NOT ALWAYS AN
EPIC STRUGGLE, INTERNAL OR
EXTERNAL. MOST OF THE TIME,
IT IS SIMPLY ROUTINE.



IT IS THE UNREMARKABLE, THE MUNDANE.
THE BELIEF THAT KEEPING OUR HEADS DOWN
AND GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS WILL KEEP
THE CHAOS AT BAY...AT LEAST FOR A WHILE.

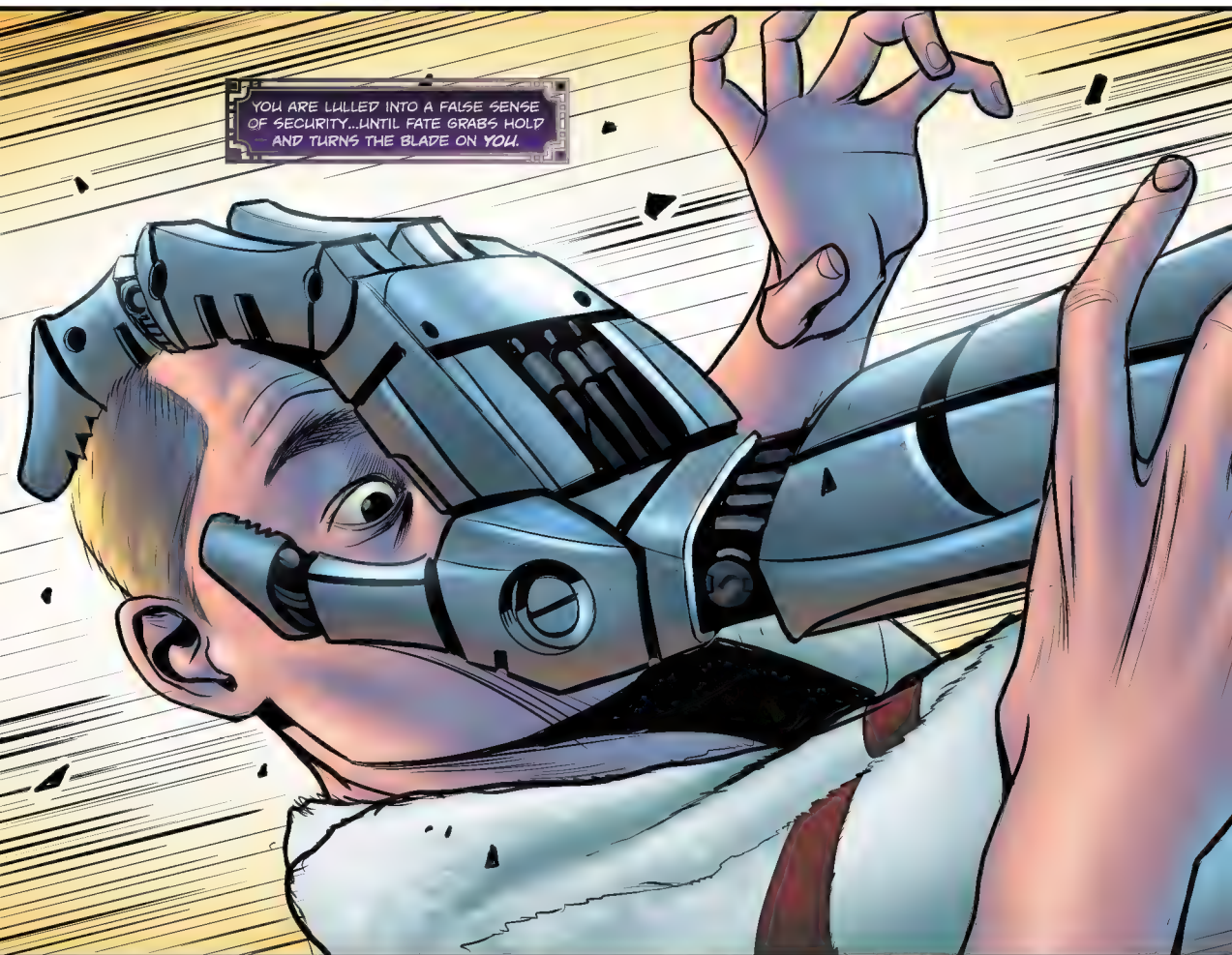
BUT THE SCARIEST PART ABOUT CONTROL IS THAT, WHILE YOU CANNOT SEE IT, OR TOUCH IT, OR TASTE IT, YOU CAN **DEFINITELY** FEEL IT. RIGHT DOWN TO YOUR BONES.

IT IS LIKE WIELDING A SWORD FORGED FROM PURE **HUBRIS**...YOU GET A SOLID GRIP ON THE HILT, AND IN THAT MOMENT, NO ONE CAN WRENCH IT FROM YOUR HANDS.



AND WHILE YOU ARE BASKING IN THE RELIEF OF YOUR TEMPORARY CONTROL, YOU LOWER YOUR SHIELDS.

YOU ARE LULLED INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY...UNTIL FATE GRABS HOLD AND TURNS THE BLADE ON YOU.



AND LIKE A MIRAGE IN THE DESERT, ALL YOUR PRECIOUS CONTROL DISAPPEARS.

To Be Continued!

NEXT ISSUE...

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT Vol. 5 IRIS

#3



Murder and Mayhem!

Blake NORTHCOTT

Donny TRAN • Oni REMALANTE Jr.

Jaymes REED



BLOCKADE
ENTERTAINMENT

CELEBRATING
10 YEARS OF
EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT: IRIS!

10th

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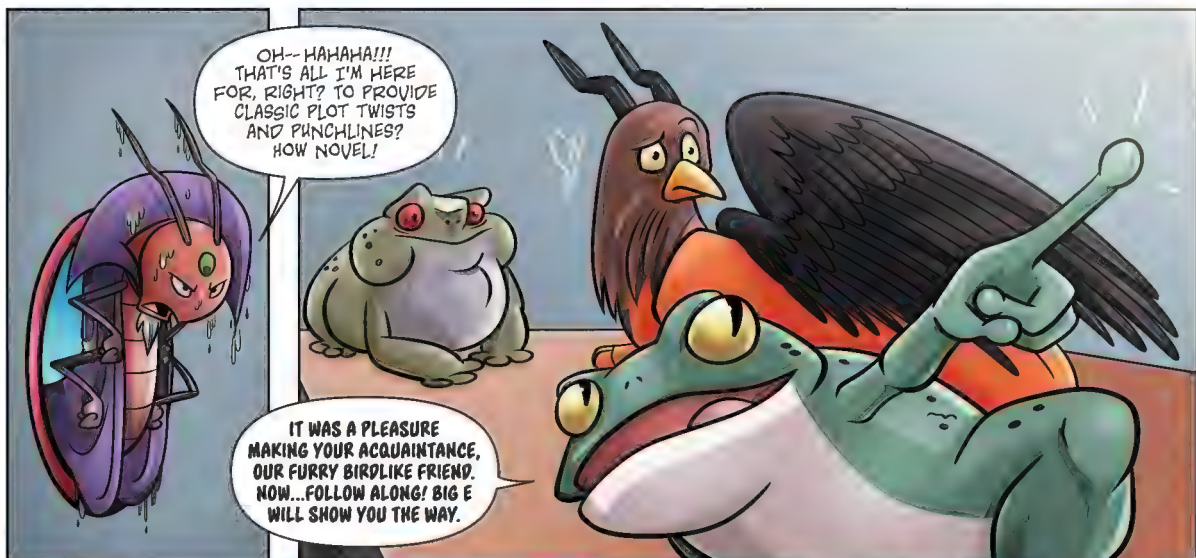
HEY! THAT'S MY OLDEST NEWEST BEST FRIEND YOU JUST SWALLOWED! LET HIM GO!



aspen
mascots

GUNDIE STORY!

YOU AND THE WORM ARE BOTH HIGHLY EXCITABLE, MY FRIEND. RELAX, BIG EARL IS NOT SNACKING ON YOUR PARTNER, WE PROMISE.



OH-- HAAAAH!!! THAT'S ALL I'M HERE FOR, RIGHT? TO PROVIDE CLASSIC PLOT TWISTS AND PUNCHLINES? HOW NOVEL!

IT WAS A PLEASURE MAKING YOUR ACQUAINTANCE, OUR FURRY BIRDLIKE FRIEND. NOW...FOLLOW ALONG! BIG E WILL SHOW YOU THE WAY.

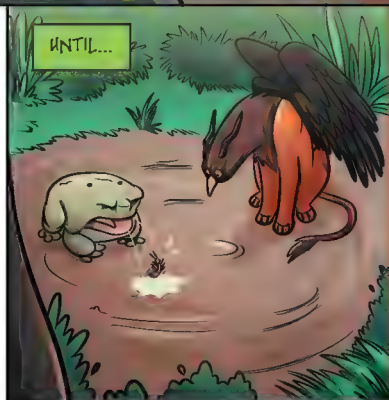


I WAS BEGINNING TO SERIOUSLY QUESTION MY QUEST ONCE MORE! MY WORM INSTINCTS HAD FAILED ME.

Test Tubes!

writer: Vince Hernandez
pencil & inks: Joie Foster | colors: Justice
letterer: Micah Myers | editor: Gabe Carrasco

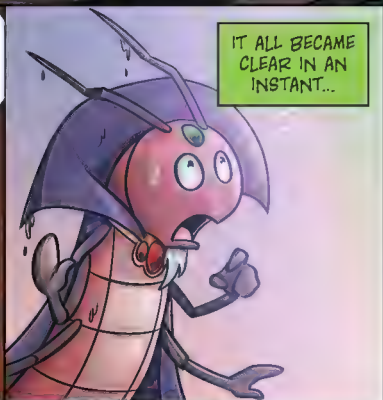
Chapter Five



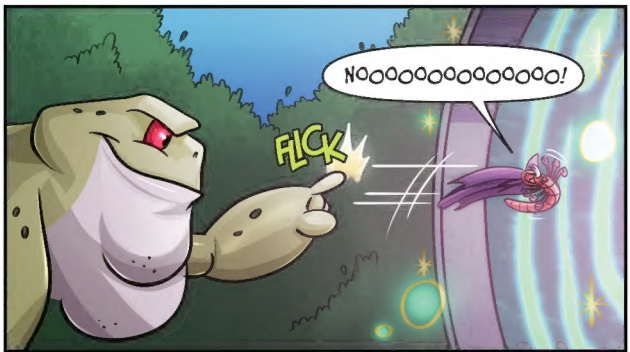
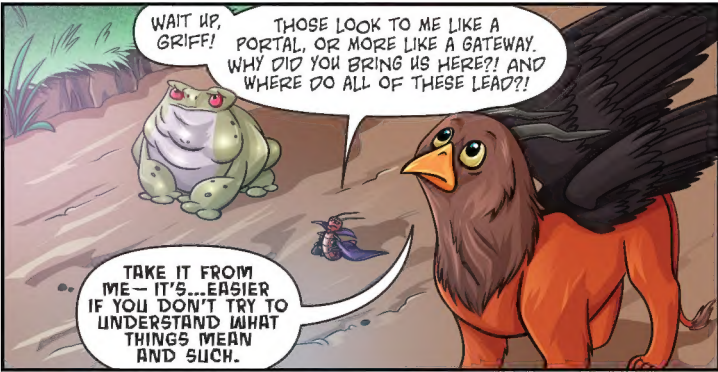
UNTIL...

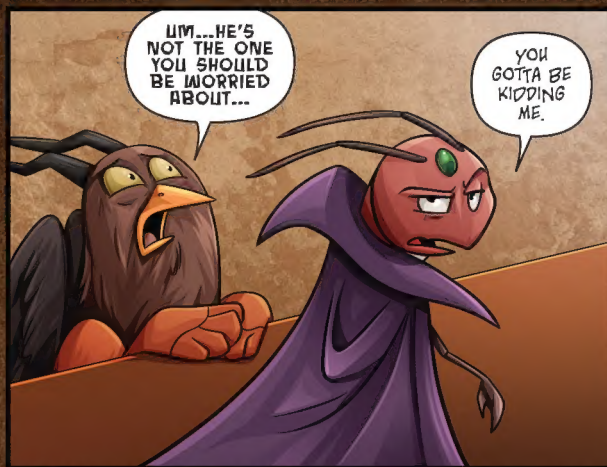
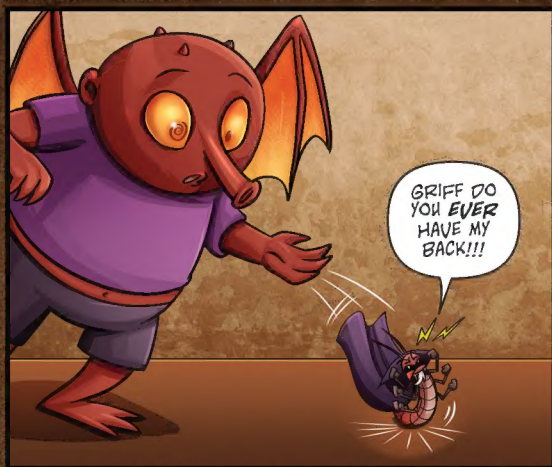


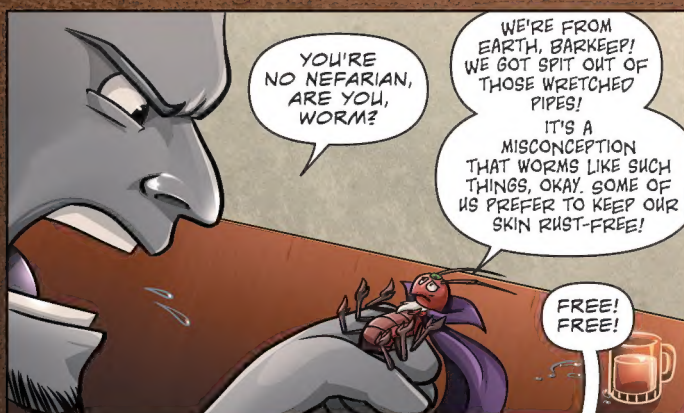
IN ALL MY YEARS OF WORMKIND, I'VE NEVER BEEN SO DISRESPECTED IN MY ENTIRE LI--



IT ALL BECAME CLEAR IN AN INSTANT...







To Be Continued
Chapter Six
Coming Next Month!

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